2: Coulander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

fires in their houses at night to keep out the damp cold that sweeps through the passes. And a man on the trail before dawn may wear a blanket over his head and carry a glowing ember with him for warmth.

On the south coast there are sometimes hurricanes and tidal waves, and many a small fishing boat and grass-covered house has been washed away in these storms. But the great mountains of the southern range deflect the winds, so that to the north their full fury is never known.

In the great Bay of Gonaïves the fishing boats sail out at night with the friendly winds that carry them to the fishing grounds of the island of La Gonave, and they return to the shore with their catches in the morning, or in the afternoon with the setting sun. The sailing boats from the tiny fishing village called Ville Matelot each day pass the deserted islet named Isle à Cabrit, where four Indian camps once stood. Today Isle à Cabrit is only a waterless, denuded place, a hunting ground for Carib and Arawak pottery and carved stone images.

In the frontier lakes of the Cul-de-Sac Plain there are wild ducks and alligators. Here the villagers fish with nets from rafts and dugout canoes. Now and then an iguana is seen, but there is little other game, because the edible wildlife of the country was long ago eaten by hungry people.

For the things that grow wild the Haitian is grateful—the avocado, the mango, the cashew, and the cotton which once planted produces again and again each year. He is grateful for the coconut palms, the calabash tree, the gourd vines, and the medicinal herbs that grow on every side. But the gifts of nature are not prolific. Most of the great stands of timber—lignum vitae, mahogany, dyewood and pine—have been cut away. Once fertile garden spots have dried up, and the soil that produces the yams, the pumpkins, the kaffir, and the rice is tired.

But the Haitian himself is not tired. He has suffered from malaria, yaws, and chronic hunger; yet out of the great old mountains of Haiti he has fashioned a way of life and a nation.

The Haitian of today was created out of the fabric of three continents—Africa, America, and Europe. He was shaped out of the plains and hills of Nigeria, Dahomey, and the Congo; the summers and winters of Europe; and the mountains and mountain mists of Haiti itself. He is the synthesis of the folk beliefs of the French and Spanish peasants, the Yoruba and the Arada of West Africa, and perhaps of the Carib Indians with whom he had close contact during his first days in the New World. He has brought into affinity the religious practices of Africa and the beliefs of the Church of Rome. He is outwardly simple and poor, but inwardly he is a complicated and rich man. He is rich in music, in the capacity for spiritual expression, in tradition, in folklore, and in memories. He has been able

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

776 commentators thought him the most important Vodun god.[24] There are two plausible reasons for this emphasis: Damballa is the bringer of rain, a necessity for good crops but a menace resulting in desolating floods when it is too copious; second, his symbol is the serpent. To Christians this is a symbol of such long standing that it is easy to assume in connection with its appearance in Vodun the guile, diabolism, or occult force which it has at times represented in Christian tradition. Damballa, however, is certainly not evil in the same way as Satan; he is not even generally baleful. To honor him is quite fitting, and this attitude is at poles removed from the diabolism [136] of the Middle Ages. There are practically no snakes in Haiti. Because of Damballa's symbol he is quite naturally associated with Saint Patrick.[25] Like Maitresse Erzulie, all his sacrificial animals must be white, for this is his color. Like her, too, he is Dahomean in origin and therefore Rada.

These three, Legba, Erzulie, and Damballa, can by no means be conceived as a trinity. On the contrary, it would be easily possible to select an entirely different group from the commonest loa, justifying inclusions and eliminations. There is, for example, Ogun, the god of war, who derives from Nigeria in Africa. Ogun can, if properly persuaded, protect his petitioners against bullets and weapon wounds. Like blood, he is red. This is also his favorite color, and so he prefers sacrifices of red cocks and food offerings of red beans with rice. There are likewise Damballa's wife, Ayida Oueddo, whose symbol is the rainbow; Agwé, god of the sea; Baron Samedi, patron spirit watching over cemeteries; Simbi, who lives in mango and calabash trees and is a bit too fond of drink. In any one country district, certain other loa might far outshine any of those mentioned. The longer one lives among the people, the more clearly he sees the validity of the first article of the creed: "I believe in gods and spirits."

787 "I believe that these loa have power to possess their worshippers . . ." It is more difficult to make intelligible to "civilized" people the phenomenon of possession than any other part of Vodun religion. Centuries of training in self-control have made us unwilling to give public vent to our emotions, whether religious or, indeed, of any sort. Not only does our tradition of good manners inhibit such ex-

24. See, for example, Bonnesu, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–26 n.

[776] 25. He is sometimes also associated with Moses, who "lifted up the serpent in the wilderness."